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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

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(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "BUYING BEEF BY GRADE." Information from the Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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Today we're asking everybody to try a little memory test. Can you remember five words in order? You don't have much trouble with a telephone number- that often has six or more letters and digits.

And if you know these five simple words correctly you are in a position to buy your beef to advantage when you go to market. For the five words are the official U.S. quality grades stamped by the government graders of the marketing service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture on all the principal cuts of the Federally graded beef sold at retail.

Not all beef carries the federal quality grade stamp, for the grading service is optional, and is paid for by the meat packer or distributor who owns the meat when it is graded. But when customers demand graded meat so they can tell what they are getting, and whether or not the price is right for the quality shown, most retail dealers will provide graded meat.

Now about those five quality words. They are: prime, choice, good, commercial, and utility, in that order. Prime, choice, good, commercial, and utility. In a moment I'll tell you what points determine each grade.

Of course everybody has a very decided preference for the best quality beef obtainable. If you can always pay a premium price you would like to buy nothing but "prime" or "choice" quality. As a matter of fact, you probably couldn't get the first or highest grade of beef in retail market, because the supply is very limited, and the loins and ribs of this grade are largely bought up by hotels, restaurants and clubs.

But the "choice" and "good" grades are very satisfactory for customary home use, and prices are more within range of the moderate income. There may also be occasions when a commercial or utility grade will serve the purpose. For example, these grades would do very well for dishes made of the less tender cuts and requiring long slow cooking and considerable seasoning. You can use a cheaper cut for a pot roast, or a casserole dish, a swiss steak, or a stew.

On the other hand, some of the less tender cuts are also ground for quick cooking, as in making hamburger or meat loaf. Flavor is then important, and you might prefer a less tender cut from a "choice" or "good" grade. So you need to know what makes the difference between one quality grade and another.

The Department of Agriculture says that the points affecting grade are quality, finish, and conformation. By quality these specialists mean the degree of marbling, or intermingling of fat through the lean; the texture, grain, and color of the cut surface of the meat. They judge finish by the quantity of fat, its kind, and how it is distributed. Conformation is the general "build" or shape of the beef cut. Consumers naturally want as much edible meat as possible from a given cut, so the proportion of edible meat- particularly the lean meat- to bone enters into the grading of the meat.

Let's check over the five grades on these points. As we have said, you will rarely find the prime grade of beef on the retail market. This quality is produced only from specially fed steers and heifers and there is very little of it, and what there is, is mostly absorbed by the restaurant and club buyers. As a housewife, you might also consider that this grade, regardless of price, was not economical for your family because of the abundance of fat. The color and appearance of both fat and lean on a prime piece of beef is the best that comes, but since we must be practical, let's pass to the next grade, or choice.

Choice is the highest grade of beef regularly sold at retail. It comes from steers and heifers specially nourished on concentrated feed. The fat covering is

moderately thick and white or creamy white. Generally it needs considerable trimming. The cut surface of the lean is smooth and velvety. The color is bright, though it may range from pale red to deep red. You can readily see rather extensive marbling in the cut surfaces. Choice grade beef is marketed the year around in the Middle West and in the East but only in limited quantities in the West.

Good is the highest grade of beef sold in volume throughout the year in practically all the main beef-consuming centers. This grade meets the needs of families who have small food budgets and want the best quality they can get for moderate prices. The fat covering is slightly thin, and creamy white, or it may have a yellowish tinge. Texture and color of the meat are good and there is some marbling but not as much as in a choice grade piece of beef. Your skill as a cook in making the less tender cuts palatable begins to count with "U.S. Good" grade, and is very important as you go down the quality scale.

The commercial grade represents a relatively large percentage of all the beef produced. It fits the needs of those who cannot have beef at all unless they buy it below average price. If you don't want to buy excess fat, this grade is satisfactory, especially for the slow-cooked cuts. The fat is thin, slightly yellow and may be soft. The cut surface of the lean may be somewhat soft and watery or slightly coarse, with practically no marbling. The color of the lean meat may vary from light red to dark red.

In appearance the cut meat of the utility grade is less attractive than the other grades, but the meat can be made palatable in economical dishes by careful cooking.

One thing more: You will also find another stamp on the meat you buy, - the little round purple stamp that says "U.S. Inspected and Passed." This stamp shows that the meat was federally inspected for wholesomeness, before it was graded. The grade of the meat is told by one of those five words- do you remember them? Prime, choice, good, commercial, utility. Very good. Class dismissed!

